

Ducks Need Farms but How do Farms Survive With Ducks?

A Case Study Integrating Agriculture and Wildlife Habitat in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia

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Abstract

Boundary Bay is an internationally significant waterfowl and shorebird overwintering area. Since the terrestrial habitat around the bay has been changed from wet meadow to agricultural lands, there have been conflicts between economic interests of pasture owners and maintenance of high quality terrestrial habitat for waterfowl that consume forage crops during winter. Biologists recognize the need to maintain a thriving farm business in the lower mainland else the area could lose its Agricultural Land Reserve designation and thus important green space for wildlife will disappear to urban development. To address the concerns of farmers and help mitigate the impact of waterfowl on forage crops, Canadian Wildlife Service, Delta Farm Institute, Ducks Unlimited, the provincial agriculture and environment ministries are working together to a) quantify the loss of forage crops to duck grazing (\$60K in 2000-2001) and b) identify factors that influence the degree to which ducks graze certain fields and not others, and use this information to mitigate the duck impacts. It appears that waterfowl prefer orchard grass to tall fescue, fields that are not laser leveled, and fields that are leased rather than owned by farmers are less likely to be managed to reduce waterfowl impacts.